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1) Pyongyang halts nuclear disablement in reaction to U.S. decision to postpone delisting; Restoring Yongbyon facilities also suggested

YOMIURI (Top play) (Excerpts)
August 27, 2008

Yasuhiro Maeda, Seoul

A North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesperson announced on Aug. 26 that the country has stopped disabling its nuclear facilities in defiance of a six-party agreement, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) has reported. The KCNA also indicated that the step was taken in response to the United States' failure to delist the North as a state sponsor of terrorism, adding the country will consider returning the half-disabled facilities at the Yongbyon nuclear complex to their original state.

Foreign Ministry Press Secretary Kazuo Kodama indicated in a press conference last evening that the ministry had obtained information

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on the suspension ahead of the announcement by the North, saying: "We have known all along that the North stopped disablement work on Aug. 14." There has been no direct information from the North, according to a senior ministry official.

Revival of intimidation strategy

The North's abrupt Aug. 26 announcement of a halt to its disablement work means the revival of its usual strategy of brinkmanship. The U.S.-DPRK talks on a nuclear declaration verification regime are reaching their most crucial phase. If the talks reach an agreement, the North will be removed from the U.S. list of nations supporting terrorism. Faced with the United States' strong demand for strict verification procedures toward the total abandonment of its nuclear programs, the North is trying to avoid rigid verification steps by keeping its "nuclear card" in reserve. Chances are high that the Pyongyang's renewed hard-line stance is part of its efforts to be delisted as a state sponsor of terrorism.

Meanwhile, Japan's relations with the North have significantly been affected by U.S.-DPRK ties. With the North reinforcing its confrontational stand toward the United States, there is a possibility that the reinvestigation in Japanese abductees by the North, as was agreed upon in bilateral talks last month, will stall. For Japan, there is nothing to do but watch the moves of the United States and North Korea.

2) North Korea halts denuclearization: Fear that abduction issue could be derailed again; "Cannot look ahead," says premier

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)
August 27, 2008

Following North Korea's announcement on August 26 that it has stopped disabling its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, concern is mounting in the Japanese government over the future of the North Korea problem. The future course of the reinvestigation into abduction cases involving Japanese nationals, which North Korea agreed on at the bilateral working-level talks in mid-August, is now unclear.

Prime Minister Fukuda yesterday admitted in front of reporters at the Kantei that he could not see what might happen next, noting, "To be honest, I cannot tell what impact this will have on the abduction

issue." He hinted at his intention to deal with the abduction issue separately from the nuclear issue, saying, "I will leave the abduction issue aside and continue to deal steadily with it."

Foreign Ministry spokesman Kazuo Kodama during a press conference simply said, "We will continue to do our utmost, including negotiations with that nation, so that the abduction issue will make headway."

North Korea had conveyed to the Japanese side its plan to launch an investigation of the abduction issue possibly this month, raising hopes in the Japanese government that progress would be made this time. Since North Korea's aim has been to have its name removed from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism, it was necessary for it to show a stance of making a serious effort to improve its ties with Japan, as well.

All the more for that reason, North Korea's statement that contained

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open hostility to the U.S. is being taken with serious concern by Japan, according to a senior Foreign Ministry official. The reason is because if North Korea has decided to confront the U.S., its desire to improve ties with Japan could also weaken.

However, some take a cool-headed view of the situation with another senior Foreign Ministry official noting, "North Korea, which is a good tactician, may be throwing various pitches to see what response the other side will make." The government expects that North Korea will start investigation into abduction cases as promised to Japan in order to avoid becoming isolated from the international community.

In any case, the statement this time has clearly implanted the impression that the nation has toughened its stance. This raises the possibility of domestic views cautious about the idea of easing sanctions gaining ground, seeing North Korea as untrustworthy.

3) Taliban's involvement suspected; NGO worker kidnapped in Afghanistan by 4 armed men

MAINICHI (Top play) (Abridged slightly)
August 27, 2008

A worker of the nongovernmental organization Peshawar-kai was abducted on Aug. 26 in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan. A spokesman for the Taliban has told the Mainichi Shimbun that they were involved in the abduction. Although the authenticity of the claim is unclear, local militant groups have been working in close cooperation with the Taliban. Some observers think the abduction was carried out by a group linked to the Taliban.

According to the Peshawar-kai, the Foreign Ministry antiterrorism office, and other sources, the person kidnapped is Kazuya Ito, 31, of Kakegawa City, Shizuoka Prefecture. Ito was abducted, along with his Afghan driver, by four armed men at 6:00 a.m. Aug. 26 (10:30 a.m. Aug. 26, Japan time). There were no escort members. There has been no demand for ransom.

According to the Peshawar-kai, Ito, along with four other Japanese workers, has been providing support for improving agriculture based at a clinic some 30 kilometers north of Jalalabad. Ito is believed to have been abducted near a village one to two kilometers southeast of the clinic near an experimental farm.

Peshawar-kai head Manji Fukumoto indicated in a press conference in Fukuoka City that the four men are not local antigovernment rebels and that there is a possibility that Ito was involved in a conflict of local residents.

According to information the Peshawar-kai has obtained from its local workers, Ito's driver was able to escape when the four armed men were driven by a local vigilante group.

The search, which was temporally called off last night, is expected to resume at dawn Aug. 27. According to Fukumoto, there is

unconfirmed information that Ito will be handed over on the morning of Aug. 27 and that the vigilante group will head for a designated site.

Meanwhile, some Taliban sources said upon admitting the group's involvement in the kidnapping that a gunfight with security

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authorities had caused casualties and deaths. They explained that the abduction was committed to demand the release of their comrades.

4) Foreign Ministry receives conflicting information due to lack of independent confirmation channels

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Abridged slightly)
August 27, 2008

The Foreign Ministry's response to the abduction of Kazuya Ito was chaotic, temporarily releasing information on Aug. 26 that Ito had been released. It reflects the fact that the ministry, without its own confirmation channels, has to rely on Afghan authorities in obtaining information amid the deteriorating security situation in the country.

The Foreign Ministry set up a taskforce on the evening of Aug. 26 and began collecting information from Afghanistan for the early release of Ito. According to Senior Vice Foreign Minister Ichita Yamamoto, who heads the taskforce, the ambassador at the Japanese embassy in Afghanistan received information at around 8:15 p.m. Aug. 26 from Afghan authorities that Ito had been released. The ministry conveyed the information to the Peshawar-kai to which Ito belongs, adding that the ministry had yet to come in contact with Ito. The ministry was informed by the Afghan side at around 9:15 p.m. that the earlier information on Ito's release was incorrect.

According to a senior ministry official, the notice came from a senior Afghan Interior Ministry official. Japanese embassy officials had not arrived at the abduction site when the information on Ito's release came. The ministry simply believed the information from the Afghan side that was supposed to be in talks with the group that kidnapped Ito.

Senior Vice Foreign Minister Yamamoto said in a press conference: "There have been conflicting reports from Afghanistan. I think this situation has resulted from the Afghan government's intention to provide Japan with as much information as possible." Ichita also indicated that embassy officials are expected to arrive at the abduction site on Aug. 27.

5) Gov't faced with difficulties in antiterror cooperation

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
August 27, 2008

Japan is now facing difficulties in its international antiterror cooperation due to such factors as the recent abduction of a Japanese man in the eastern part of Afghanistan. In the government, there are moves exploring the feasibility of sending the Self-Defense Forces to Afghanistan to assist with its reconstruction instead of continuing the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean. In Afghanistan, however, the security situation is going from bad to worse. Meanwhile, Japan has few options.

The MSDF's current refueling activities in the Indian Ocean are set to terminate in January. The opposition parties are opposed to continuing the MSDF's refueling mission, and the government cannot expect to extend the refueling mission. "In time we will have to consider another option instead of refueling," a government official

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said.

One of the possible options is to send SDF troops to Afghanistan to assist with its reconstruction. The Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry sent a fact-finding survey team to Afghanistan in June to explore the feasibility of tasking Air Self-Defense Force C-130 transport planes and Ground Self-Defense Force helicopters with airlift services. In the end, the government decided to forgo an SDF dispatch for the time being. However, one official indicated that an SDF dispatch to Afghanistan could be one of the possible options if the MSDF's refueling mission is called off.

The abduction this time also gives the impression that the local security situation is deteriorating. As it stands, the government may become even more reluctant to task the SDF with reconstruction assistance in Afghanistan.

6) LDP's Matsunami leaves for Afghanistan

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
August 27, 2008

Kenshiro Matsunami, a House of Representatives member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, departed Kansai Airport yesterday evening for Kabul in the wake of the abduction of a Japanese man in Afghanistan. Matsunami has been tackling Afghan issues for years and has a number of local contacts. "I will collect information first, and then I want to negotiate with them to help him out," Matsunami told a Nikkei reporter before his departure. "I also want to meet with President Karzai and ask the Afghan government for cooperation," he added.

7) Allegation of shady accounting evoking calls even from New Komeito for Ota's resignation

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)
August 27, 2008

A new source of trouble is emerging for the Fukuda administration. It was found yesterday that a political organization linked to Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Seiichi Ota registered the home of his secretary as its office and declared a huge amount of office expenses in its political fund report. Ota intends to examine the details and make an announcement this week. The focus of attention is on whether he will be able to give a persuasive explanation. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda is now in a great quandary as the opposition camp has seized the chance to take advantage of the government's weakness prior to the start of debate in an extraordinary Diet session on such controversial bills as one to extend Japan's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean.

Ota said in a press conference: "The secretary registered his home as the organization's office as the second-best measure. We have disclosed the registration, so transparency has been ensured," adding: "There is no problem." But when he was asked for what purpose the reported office expenses were used, Ota replied: "I don't know," although Ota had said that rent had not been paid.

As it stands, Ota's explanation was not clear-cut. Hidehisa Otsuji, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party's caucus in the House of Councillors, said in reference to Ota's willingness to reveal the receipts: "If there is a problem somewhere, he will have to examine

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it. He should make the receipts public." Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura listened to detailed circumstances through a secretary. A government source commented: "If political expenses have been properly reported and if activities have been appropriately carried out, we see no problem."

LDP Secretary General Taro Aso expressed hope that Ota will fulfill his responsibility to clarify the matter, but his aide flatly said: "The government should try to put an end to this scandal before it is pursued in the upcoming Diet session. This is a problem linked to the crisis management of the Prime Minister's Office." New Komeito President Akihiro Ota told a press briefing: "We have not talked about whether he should resign," but he added: "He must explain the circumstances in detail." Another senior New Komeito member

categorically said: "The agriculture minister should quit with good grace before being pressed into a corner."

8) Agriculture Minister Ota's political organization found to have logged 24.8 million yen as operating expenses from 2000 through 2002

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)
August 27, 2008

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Seiichi Ota's political organization, Ota Seiichi daigishi o sodateru kai, has reported operating expenses using his secretary's home as its main office. Regarding this issue, it was also found from political fund reports carried in the Tokyo metropolitan government's gazette issued on August 26 that the organization registered the same address as the address of its office from 2000 through 2002 and logged a total of 24.8 million yen in operating expenses, including about 9.5 million yen as expenses for operating the office.

Operating expenses of the office at the current address total 48.2 million yen, including expenses for 2005 and 2006.

It has also become clear that the organization in 2005 donated 25 million yen to Ota's supporters' association in his constituency using funds raised at various meetings, such as the "Morning Seminar," and 1.8 million yen in 2006 to the Liberal Democratic Party faction to which he belongs. It was found that the organization did not use his fund management organization or the LDP's local chapter, which he heads, but via another route.

According to the Tokyo Metropolitan Electoral Management Committee, the organization was established under its jurisdiction in Shibuya Ward in 1995 under the name Ota Seiichi kun o sodateru kai. It was relocated to the present address in 2000. The name of the organization was changed to the present name in 2003. When Ota lost his parliamentary seat in the 2003 Lower House election, the organization again changed its name to Ota Seiichi zen daigishi o sodateru kai. The office was then relocated to Roppongi, Minato Ward. However, when Ota regained his position as a parliamentary representative in 2005, the organization again adopted the present name. It also registered the address of his secretary's home as its address.

9) Fukuda on hot seat over appointment of Ota as agriculture minister

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Lead paragraph)

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August 27, 2008

The issue of "politics and money" has emerged again. When asked about his political organization's murky office fees included in its political funding reports, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Seiichi Ota stressed yesterday: "I don't think there is a problem." However, it will inflict major damage on the Fukuda administration, which was set to go on the offensive. Why do the same kinds of unclear expenditures continue to happen? Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's responsibility for appointing Ota will be called into question. Prior to maneuvering between the ruling and opposition camps in the upcoming extraordinary Diet session, the political situation has already been thrown into turmoil.

10) Fukuda to be forced further into corner

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Slightly abridged)
August 27, 2008

The issue of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Seiichi Ota's political organization's nuclear office expenditures is expected to force the Fukuda administration, which has yet to overcome its slump in the polls, further into a corner. There is a view among government officials and senior ruling coalition members that there is no legal problem. However, with the government politically weak, the laxity of its administration has been

exposed.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda told reporters last evening: "Since this is Minister Ota's political activities, what I can say is that he should give a thorough explanation as a politician."

However, Ota is not just one politician, he is a cabinet minister appointed by Prime Minister Fukuda. This is a political problem. Fukuda appears to have felt responsibility for having appointed him.

In the former Abe government, three agriculture ministers were replaced due to money-related scandals, which was a cause for a major defeat of the ruling camp in last summer's Upper House election. However, Fukuda and senior ruling coalition members have not learned from the defeat in the election.

Ota, referring to food safety measures, made a slip of the tongue, saying: "Consumers are noisy." The outspoken Ota is certain to come under fire in the upcoming extra Diet session. A junior Liberal Democratic Party lawmaker said: "Calls for replacing the Prime Minister may grow."

11) Extra Diet session expected to have some rough going, given discord in ruling camp

NIKKEI (Page 3) (Excerpts)
August 27, 2008

The government has finally decided through thorny negotiations on the opening date for the next extraordinary Diet session and its duration. Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda has indicated eagerness to enact key bills to prop up the economy and to extend the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean. But cooperation from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is unlikely. In the ruling camp, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New

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Komeito, the latter of which wants an early dissolution of the House of Representatives for a snap election, have been out of step. In addition, the alleged shady accounting of office expenses involving Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Seiichi Ota came to light yesterday. Developments of the session fraught with potential trouble are unpredictable.

On the opening day of the session on Sept. 12, the prime minister will deliver a policy speech, followed by representative interpellations by each political party on Sept. 16-18 and deliberations on a supplementary budget bill in late September. The ruling camp envisions this scenario for the early stage of the 70-day session, but uncertainty is looming over the session.

In the ruling camp, discord has been emerging. Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura yesterday indicated his consideration for the New Komeito, the LDP's junior coalition partner, with a plan to give priority to a supplementary budget bill in the extraordinary Diet session. But the LDP remains unable to mend the rift with the New Komeito, which insists on the need for large-scale fiscal disbursements with an eye on a Lower House election late this year or early next year.

The estrangement in the ruling camp will inevitably affect the fate of the bill to extend Japan's refueling mission. The government and ruling camp hope to expedite deliberations on the bill in the Lower House Special Committee. However, since the extra budget bill will be enacted in mid-October at the earliest, even if deliberations on the bill to continue the refueling operation start afterward, it will be impossible to see it passed in the Lower House before late October. In such a case, only about one month will be left.

The DPJ has opposed an extension of the refueling mission. If the bill is sent to the opposition-controlled House of Councillors, there is no possibility that the bill will be voted down during the session, according to many party members. In order for the government to take a revote in the Lower House based on the rule under which the bill is regarded as rejected 60 days after it is

sent to the Upper House, extending the session will be necessary.

The New Komeito, however, remains cautious about resorting to a revote, because the party, which wants an early election, fears that the tactic might be criticized as authoritarian management of the Diet. If public support for the Fukuda administration remains low, the New Komeito might not agree to extend the session.

If the government fails to implement its priority policies due to circumstances in the ruling camp, Prime Minister Fukuda will be immediately driven into a corner. This is an October-crisis scenario that may lead to Fukuda's resignation.

12) 70-day extra Diet session likely to fall into confusion

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)
August 27, 2008

The government and ruling parties have decided to convene the upcoming extraordinary Diet session on Sept. 12 and have it run for 70 days until Nov. 20. Prime Minister Fukuda will not only have to face an opposition camp that has stepped up its confrontational stance toward the government, he also must deal with the ruling coalition, particularly the New Komeito, that is calling on him to

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dissolve the House of Representatives for a snap election before the end of the year or early next year. He may be forced to make a decision that could put his prime minister's post on the line.

In the upcoming extra session, the Prime Minister has given priority to enacting three pieces of legislature: 1) a supplementary budget containing a package of economic stimulus measures; 2) a bill extending the Antiterrorism Special Measures Law enabling Japan to continue its refueling mission in the Indian Ocean; and 3) a bill establishing a consumer affairs agency.

The government and ruling coalition plan to start first deliberations on the supplementary budget bill and then on the refueling bill, followed by the consumer affairs agency bill. Since the opposition, which controls the Upper House, has opposed these bills, the ruling LDP and the New Komeito have no choice but to take a two-thirds overriding vote in the Lower House, applying the constitutional 60-day rule. It will be difficult to enact the bills during the 70-day session. Therefore, Fukuda won't be able to accomplish his objective unless he succeeds in convincing the New Komeito to go with an extension of the extra session in order to carry out an overriding vote in the Lower House.

However, the New Komeito began distancing itself from Fukuda after the July Group of Eight (G-8) Hokkaido Summit. There is a growing view in the New Komeito that the party won't be able to fight in the next Lower House election with the current set up. The reason is because Fukuda has shown no sign of being willing to dissolve the Lower House at an early time. There is a rumor that the New Komeito may urge Fukuda to resign in exchange for its cooperation to enact the refueling and consumer agency bills.

Meanwhile, the prevailing view in the government is that Fukuda has no intention to dissolve the Lower House until next spring, when the national budget for fiscal 2009 clears the Diet; and that he has no intention to give up his position. The reason is because Fukuda instructed to Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Tatsuya Ito to compile an economic vision by next spring.

The question is whether Fukuda can convince the New Komeito without using such political cards as the dissolution of the Lower House or his resignation. Tension will likely emerge over the timing of Lower House dissolution and a general election, as well as Fukuda's course of action around November when he is forced to make decisions on whether to extend the Diet session and whether to take a second vote in the Lower House.

13) Defense Ministry to be restructured in FY2010

ASAHI (Page 4) (Abridged)

August 27, 2008

The Defense Ministry yesterday reported its reform plan to Prime Minister Fukuda. According to the plan, the Defense Ministry will establish special advisory posts in fiscal 2009 to assist the defense minister as part of its reform measures. In fiscal 2010, the Defense Ministry will restructure its organization involving the Self-Defense Forces' staff offices. Specifically, the ministry will unify its defense buildup planning sections.

The reform plan is based on a report of recommendations worked out in July by a government advisory panel. The Defense Ministry will

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abolish its defense counselor system, under which its internal bureaus' senior officials have assisted the defense minister. Instead, the ministry will have special advisors as political appointees to the defense minister. In addition, the ministry will also raise its defense council-a body made up of politicians, civilian officials, and SDF officers-to the highest organ. It will present the reform plan as a budget-related bill to the Diet at its ordinary session next year.

14) Poll: 55 PERCENT think women can be happy even without marriage

YOMIURI (Page 1) (Full)
August 27, 2008

A total of 55 PERCENT of the public think women can live a happy life even without getting married, with only 39 PERCENT saying they do not think so, the Yomiuri Shimbun found from its recent annual public opinion survey. In a 1978 survey, the proportion of those who thought women could be happy without getting married was only 26 PERCENT , while those who did not think so accounted for 50 PERCENT . However, the public's awareness of marriage has now changed.

The survey this time was conducted Aug. 9-10 on a face-to-face basis to probe the public view of marriage.

"Do you think it is desirable for a man to devote himself to work and for a woman to homemaking?" In response to this question, 30 PERCENT answered "yes," with 68 PERCENT saying "no." In the 1978 survey, respondents were asked if they thought a married couple would be happy if a man pursued his work and women kept house and took care of family. To this question, "yes" accounted for 71 PERCENT , with "no" at 22 PERCENT . According to the recent survey, however, 65 PERCENT thought it would be better for people to get married, with 33 PERCENT saying that people do not necessarily have to marry. As seen from these figures, the general public remains affirmative of marriage. The proportion of those thinking it better to marry increased 11 percentage points from 54 PERCENT in a survey taken in 2003 five years ago. The survey this time showed a sharp increase in the proportion of those thinking it desirable to marry.

ZUMWALT